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THE CHURCH AND CLASS CONFLICTS

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE LAYMEN'S COMMITTEE ON INTER-CHURCH SURVEY

On January 18, 1919, it was privately stated in New York that the latest phase of the so-called "Laymen's Movement" was an agreement reached that morning to concentrate the resources of the organization upon an "Inter-Church Survey." Imagination at once suggested that "the business man's point of view" will doubtless penetrate into phases of contemporary life in a way which will alter the relations of light and shadow in the usual religious surveys of the world. For some time the present writer had been asking himself what modifications he would make in the direction of religious effort if it were within his power to determine the policies of American churches for the next generation. He had been jotting down a record of his reflections in attempting to frame an answer to that question. The result is not an academic man's discussion of merely abstract theory. It is a faithful reflection of an academic man's attempt to get his bearings within present obscurities which are not academic. In the writer's judgment, the most serious question which religious men can ask today is, What may and should religion mean to the world in the immediate future? The memoranda which follow, in the form of an open letter, are faithful transcripts from the writer's notes while he was trying to clarify his own judgment, first, about the most Christian course that can be advised in general, and, second, with respect to that particular factor of the religious problem which, if the past is an index of probabilities, is least likely to receive adequate attention from organized Christianity. The contents of the letter will sufficiently indicate the writer's further conviction that the faulty sense of proportion thus in evidence in the history of Christianity

accounts in large measure for the margin between what religion actually does count for, and what by essential fitness it should count for, in the present generation.

GENTLEMEN:

It makes no difference what our private opinions are about class conflicts. It would be incautious to doubt that the world is to have more of them before it has fewer, and that the United States will be no exception to this rule.

It makes no difference what our private opinions are about Bolshevism. Decent prudence dictates that each country in the world should be prepared to cope with it. In every western country there are certain symptoms of and certain materials for the same outbreak of one class against all others.

There are men of wide acquaintance throughout the world, men who think themselves competent to compare conditions elsewhere with those in the United States, who declare that Americans are living upon a slumbering volcano; that not merely something distantly like Bolshevism, but Bolshevism itself, with all its extravagance of theory, with all its intolerance, with all its brutal ruthlessness, is to run its course in this country not less than in each country of Europe. These men declare that we are not to have the privilege of learning how wide are the differences between social classes today by assisting as mere spectators at a tragedy staged in Russia; on the contrary they assert that, along with Western Europe, North America must pass through a bloody convulsion before civilization can make its final reckoning with this latest type of assault upon its ideals and its achievements.

For the purposes of this letter it is not necessary to become prophetic, one way or the other, about this particular prognosis. It would amount to dilatory tactics if we should allow ourselves, without more facts than are now available, to be drawn into a discussion of the probability of this forecast. It would retard more than it would advance my main purpose if I should digress into an examination of the likenesses and unlikenesses between Bolshevism and those types of class protest which have been recognized factors in our American situation for more than a generation. Certain things may be assumed as matters of common knowledge, and they justify

appeal to certain considerations which the facts urge with extraordinary force.

In the first place, it is notorious that all over the world, in proportion as industry has passed from the type which we may call one-man enterprise to the type which may be called mass enterprise, class distinctions have come into the open between those who have nothing but their current earnings and those who control in their own legal right land or capital, or both. In the United States few people began to be aware of this particular class cleavage until after the Civil War. Since that time it has grown more and more real and evident, yet we Americans are still trying to ignore its existence. One of our American peculiarities is our illusion that the word "democracy" in our talk guarantees democracy in our lives.

Everyone who has given fairly mature thought to the facts knows, further, that the class distinctions which the words "labor" and "capital" draw are not precise. There is a no-man's-land between members of the two classes. In this zone are people who in the main fall under the one description, while their decisive interests group them with the class indicated by the other description. Thus, on the one hand, the interests and the sympathies of certain small proprietors carry them for practical purposes into the class known in Europe as the proletariat, while many men of the professional and employee types, who would often have difficulty in putting up collateral enough to get a small loan at a bank, are committed by their bread-and-butter interests to solidarity with the capitalist class.

It is common knowledge, too, among people who pry into these things, that this latter fact has been an efficient stabilizer of our social conditions. The people in this intermediate zone have actually served as effective social shock absorbers. Because of them the differences which definitions make out between the capitalist and the non-capitalist groups have been less absolute in practice.

It is well known, again, among both theoretical and practical students of the subject, that from the beginning of actual stratification between the capitalist and the non-capitalist types, and

especially in times of outbreaking conflict between them, many men have stoutly contended that the reasons for conflict between these classes are more imaginary than real. They have maintained that the interests of capitalists and non-capitalists, of employers and employees, are essentially identical. Up to the present time there has been much less exchange of opinion between the capitalistic and the non-capitalistic interests on this fundamental issue in the United States than there has been in Europe, especially in England. Such discussion as has been carried on here about the precise underlying principle has been chiefly within academic circles, while the actual collisions between the two interests have been mostly sheer trials of endurance between certain capitalists on the one hand and certain non-capitalists on the other. This has been the gist of the case both in direct struggles between employers and employees and in certain political struggles in which the issues were almost as sharply drawn between capitalists and non-capitalists.

Least doubtful among these things which may be taken for granted is that, for better or for worse, the war has changed all this. Nobody needs to be convinced that we do not live in the same world which we lived in before the war. A short time ago a professor of botany was asked how much botanists could tell about the immediate future of such a formal garden as the one at Versailles, or those in many of our public parks and private estates in America, if it were demolished as thoroughly as the war areas had been on the Western Front. How much could be told about the first growth that would spring up on that war-plowed ground? His prompt answer was: "Not very much, but we could set down one thing as certain, viz., that whatever grew at first would be something very different from what was growing before." Every civilization is a formal garden. Our American civilization is a formal garden. It is not a state of nature. It is not virgin soil. It is not first-growth. From the time the first charter was granted for a colony on these strange shores, from the time of the Articles of Confederation under which the colonies banded together to resist George III, from the time that the successful colonies reluctantly consented to adopt a constitution as the only alternative with anarchy and loss of the independence that they had gained, from the time of our first adop-

tion of the Washingtonian creed of avoidance of entangling alliances, from the time of committing ourselves to the dubious and ambiguous but all the more insistent Monroe Doctrine of "hands off" in South America, down to our latest constitutional amendment and federal or state statute, together with all the private adjustments we have made under this public and private law, Americans have been laying out and cultivating a vast formal garden—our own special type of society—with its own products. Some of these are more or less peculiar to our own soil and climate; others are exotics which in a few cases flourish as though they were natives; but all together they form a system of traditions and conventions which, like all conventions and traditions, are secure only so long as the circumstances which produced them and favored them remain.

Suddenly the circumstances which produced our American civilization and favored it are revolutionized. Our formal garden has been turned into a war area. Our national isolation has become involuntary and unavoidable world-community. Our internal arrangements which enabled us to maintain a higher degree of national complacency than any other western nation have become a collection of unstable and more or less temporary and provisional makeshifts. We do not know which of these arrangements will become parts of our next formal garden, which will be abandoned, and which will merge into variations which do not yet appear. For war purposes we are now in grim practice of programs which were regarded as impossible only two years ago. We have acted upon a theory of the relation of the government to the citizen which reverses presumptions and doctrines that came over in the Mayflower and had dominated our imagination, in spite of much contrary practice, until 1917. For war purposes we changed ourselves in a few weeks from the most self-determining nation in the world to a people yielding up control to government in ways which an unquestionable majority would have vetoed as impossibly socialistic up to the beginning of the war. Most of us, our present Chief Magistrate apparently among the number, supposed we still held with Thomas Jefferson, "that government is best which governs least"; that the only proper business of government is to be a big policeman, preserving order while individuals make their own fortunes in a free

field with no favor. We have temporarily out-Germaned the Germans in some particulars in allowing our government for the time being to take the place of an earthly Providence. We have taken orders from the government of a sort which none but a few dreamers supposed anyone now living would ever see the American people permitting their government to issue. We have tolerated the government in our sugar bowls and flour barrels, and from those household privacies out to our industries, our transportation, our news supplies, our diplomacy, our amusements, and in some cases our religious worship. No wise man supposes that in all its details this change is here to stay. Still less can any wise man suppose that this scrambling of our national ideas and practices can be completely unscrambled. We realize that our Civil War was "the birth of a nation" in more senses than one, yet the issues between the Union and the Confederate states were superficial compared with the radical conflict between autocracy and democracy into which the German war developed. Even such a petty affair as the Cuban War made great changes in our national outlook and temper. It would be fatuous to suppose that we can emerge from the shock of this latest experience unaffected by the physical and mental and moral disruptions which the shock has produced. Especially disturbing is the fact just referred to, that in order to defend ourselves against autocracy we have found ourselves obliged to adopt some of the methods of autocracy. This fact in itself is quite likely to return to trouble us. Its threatenings may turn out to be among the gravest factors in the coming reconstruction.

I repeat that this letter does not undertake to prove that class conflicts in general, particularly conflicts between capital and labor in the ordinary meaning of that phrase, are to be intensified as a result of the war, or that they are to confront the churches with new situations. It undertakes rather to set forth the obvious probabilities, which are already commonplace among people who have watched the outward events of the last four years, and to indicate the attitude of mind in which it is advisable to study the factors which must inevitably remodel, more or less, our social life in general and therewith our church life.

The matter before us at this point is the outlook in the special direction of economic class conflicts. What signs are in sight about changes in their character or in their methods? What demands are they likely to make on the churches, whether old demands, recognized or unrecognized by the churches, or demands which are new in kind or degree? In other words, can we see that the temper of either capitalists or laborers, or both, toward class conflicts, whether they have been on the other side or have remained at home during the war, is in any way changed as a result of the war, and if so what can we see in the changes that puts up a new set of problems, or new forms of old problems, to the churches?

It is obvious, in the first place, that these questions cannot be answered finally in advance of an adequate survey. I am now proposing questions, not answering them, and I am trying to look forward as far as possible toward the kinds of inquiry that will be of most avail.

Without going back for a review or analysis of economic class conflicts up to date in the United States, and without entering upon a review or analysis of previous attitudes of the churches toward those conflicts, whether in their latent or in their overt forms, but assuming that in a general way the facts of both sorts are familiar, I venture to schedule certain signs of the times which indicate movements that must be watched.

1. What may be called normal war activities have a tendency, among other things, to stimulate the economic interests which conflict. In particular:

2. "War profits" on the one hand and emergency rates of wages on the other tend to set standards of both profits and wages which the respective interests naturally want to maintain. In so far as previous habits are in operation, there will be strong temptation for each side to try to maintain its standard at the expense of the other. This of course means friction at the very least.

3. The *abnormal* participation of government in economic management in war time tends to unsettle the minds of each economic class about the permanent relation of government to its peculiar interests. As a single illustration, we have seen the one policy of our government toward the wheat growers and the opposite policy

toward the cotton growers; that is, we have seen the government making and unmaking prices. With the many object-lessons of this sort which have directly affected so many different industries, it is again plain human nature to figure on further use of governmental power for class benefit. People who have had direct governmental assistance in strengthening their own economic situation would be more than human if they did not desire to have that assistance continued. On the other hand, people who have seen others enjoy that artificial benefit while they have had no similar direct benefit would be more than human if they did not tend both toward jealousy against these favored interests and toward desire for similar governmental support for themselves; that is to say, an inevitable by-product of necessary governmental interference with business is a large increase of unrest among those who feel themselves discriminated against and a large increase of desire on the part of those who have been favored by government to hold fast what they have got and catch what they can. Of course these two tendencies are not likely to reach anything like stable equilibrium without much intermediate give and take. The action and reaction between the groups affected in opposite ways may leave a margin of good or evil in the long run. We are immediately concerned with the prospect that in the near future they are more likely to disturb than to pacify.

In other words, the economic interest in this connection becomes political. The temptation is for each one that wants high commodity prices and low wages to trade with the political party that will bid highest in those terms, and for each one who is interested in low commodity prices and high wages to do the same. In both cases there is danger of turning parties, and the administration that is the government for the time being, into tools of conflicting class interests and, by operation of a vicious circle, into mischief-makers between economic classes.

4. The *normal* operations of government in times of war tend, again, to induce habits of mind in everyone concerned which are directly contrary to traditional Americanism. This factor alone is sufficient to create certain difficult problems of readaptation. It is in no proper sense an argument against the kind of war we have

been waging. It is one of the unavoidable incidents of the most righteous and wisely conducted war. Modern nations are never so paternalistic as when they are waging war. They have to be, in order to control efficient armies and navies. In war the government feeds, clothes, shelters, amuses, schools, nurses, insures, its fighting forces. Thus in countless ways the government is guardian as well as commander. Even in our own armies there have probably been thousands of men who never for a single month in their previous lives had three such regular and ample meals a day as they had every day while in the service. Not only these men but others whose ideas would be less changed by that particular item have become accustomed to seeing the government do big things, both for them and with them. Instead of being little more than a mere name to most of them, the government has suddenly loomed up as something very like a miracle-worker. It has created cities for them to live in while they were getting their training. It has commandeered the resources of the most highly developed science and technology to make those cities convenient and commodious. It has built and equipped other cities to produce munitions of war and means of getting them and the forces to use them transported to the fighting zone. Considering the belligerent nations as a whole, this war has been a more stupendous demonstration of the possibilities of national and even international team work than the most extravagantly imaginative socialist had ever supposed possible in any near future. Whether people believe in what their governments have done or not, the bulk of these things, the momentum of them, their resistlessness in pushing other things aside, and in having their own way, often in spite of much that we have supposed to be physical, and mental, and economic, and moral law and gospel, must have put a new look on the world for millions of men. The idea is bound to lodge itself in millions of minds, "We can do anything we please in this world if we only get together. If we can perform such wonders in destruction, what's the matter with equal wonders in construction." We can see that this idea is already reinforcing the worst forms of the German creed that might makes right as well as the belief which has demolished Kaiserism, that right makes might. More than this, people who are not squeamish about the

rights and wrongs of things, provided they want them, are already stealing marches upon the people who want, when they build, to build righteously. For the last hundred years, and notoriously for the last generation, in every industrial country the belief has rapidly gained recruits that government is a conspiracy to make the strong stronger and the weak weaker. There were never in the world as many people as there are today who make it their first business in life to spread some version of this doctrine. In line with the first paragraph of this letter, whatever we think about these doctrines and the propagandists of them, there has been a sort of granulation of old mental habits and a setting up of new mental attitudes in the course of the war which make more minds receptive of these ideas than ever before. In the United States no less than in the rest of the world more men than ever before are going to feel free to want what they want; more men are going to be persuadable that if they don't get what they want it is the government's fault; and more men are going to be in a state of mind to follow leaders who say, "Come on! Be the government, and grab what you want!"

Of course, this again works both ways. It affects the classes interested primarily in things as they are as well as the classes interested primarily in things as they are not. I repeat that I am not now dealing with prophecies of ultimate outcomes. I am trying to point out some of the most obvious visible evidences that, at the very least, we must make up our minds that in the United States in the near future there are to be class frictions, class conflicts, different somewhat both in kind and in degree from those with which we have been acquainted hitherto.

5. Never since the founding of the *International*, in 1864, have there been such facilities as there are now for the transmission of class impulses from one country to all other countries. This fact becomes ominous when we consider.

6. In this country, as was observed above, conflicts between economic classes have mostly taken the form of trials of physical strength between employers and employees. In a very slight degree have they ever been conflicts of essential principles. They settled merely whether at the given time and place the owners could beat the help or the reverse. Whichever way the specific struggle

turned out, it decided little or nothing about the underlying question whether there is anything in principle, anything in the permanent legal relations between capital and labor, which ought to be put under investigation. As a broad general proposition, neither capitalists nor laborers in this country have shown much interest in questions of that depth. The case is very different in Europe. The Romish apostolic succession is hardly better made out than the almost unbroken line of theorists who from the earliest record until now have attacked the property institutions of their time. From the Hebrew prophets and the Greek philosophers down to the innumerable species of anticapitalists today in the different European countries, scarcely a generation has failed to furnish its connecting link in the chain. Of Europe in general it may be said that, even before the war, proletarian organizations occupied a point of view from which our American type of labor struggle appeared piffling. They still used force to compel decisions about details, but this method was pretty generally understood to be merely incidental to their main program. Their controlling purpose, even that of the more temperate British leaders of the Arthur Henderson type, has for a long time been reconstruction of property institutions in general. Their aims have varied from literal communism, which is the present Bolshevik ideal, to proposals not very different from those of the American Progressive party in 1912. Each group of European anticapitalists has worked out a theory of its own in impeachment of the laws of property on grounds of what they regard as fundamental principles. The most dangerous single factor in each European country today is the organized campaign to put capitalists out of existence and, to use one of the phrases which have become commonplace among these agitators, "to socialize capital." The idea is that all capital is to become public property and each citizen is to be a pro-rata capitalist; no individual is to be any more of a capitalist than every other individual. Moreover the idea is spreading through Europe, and coming across the seas, that it is right to realize this ideal by any kind and degree of violence necessary to gain the end.

Of course this, usually minus the violence, is the main plank of all the socialist platforms which have been familiar for more than

half a century. The point which I am emphasizing here and now is that hitherto this theory has cut comparatively little figure in the United States. There have been a few noisy and mischievous agitators of the extreme type, but they have scarcely had a hearing within the great body of American laborers. When employees have fought employers they have usually fought for specific tangible things, not for intangible theories. The Federation of Labor most notably has fought socialists as regularly and quite as bitterly as it has fought capitalists. It would be as frivolous unpreparedness as we suffered from in the war if either business or politics or religion failed to read the signs that this detachment of American wage-earners from European temper toward capital is already a thing of the past. The revolutionary anticapitalistic doctrines are likely in a short time to be as familiar in every trade-union local in this country as they have become in Europe.

The words "socialism" and "socialist," as the name of a creed, or of a party, have become so discredited during the war that they are now abandoned by some of the best-known leaders of that movement, and not improbably the terms will very soon pass out of use in this country. The thing for which these words have stood is likely to become very much more influential than it has ever been before in the United States, and it is to be feared that the animus of it with which we are next to become acquainted will be much more disturbing than any of its previous manifestations, except in isolated instances.

Nothing in this letter is strictly to be interpreted as the writer's surrender to a scare, or as his willing or unwilling promotion of needless anxiety. No one, however, can have followed, even at a distance, the development of proletarian doctrine during the latest fifteen years, and especially since the Russian revolution, without discovering incomparably more evidence that Americans are on the eve of the most serious economic class struggles we have ever known—unless we put our Civil War in that class—than was visible in the first half of 1914 that men then living would ever be involved in a European war. And these indications do not all come by any means from within the sections of our population that correspond with the proletariat in Europe. There are shortsighted managers

of massed capital whose actions could hardly tend more directly than they do to the provocation of anarchy if they publicly announced that as their purpose.

The consideration which I am now urging is not that any of the things referred to in the last paragraph, or any of the other things which are roots of bitterness between capital and labor, are recent developments. The point is rather that new influences are now gaining effect in this country in ways which cannot fail to give these long-discussed things new meaning and new driving force in American minds. We say facts are stubborn things, and we know that facts are also provocative things, when seen in certain lights. The sinking of the *Titanic* and of the *Lusitania* were in themselves equal horrors. The one was a challenge to England and America to thresh out again all their standard theories of marine architecture. The other was a call to war, and to fiercer war. A fact standing by itself may be eloquent, say the wreck either of a railroad train or of a railroad corporation. A fact with a theory attached may be incendiary, say either of these wrecks interpreted by the public as the result of criminal intent. A workman who wants better pay, or shorter hours, or a different kind of boss, or a union bound to get these things for its members may be a troublesome factor to deal with, but either is a trivial affair compared with a working population filled with the idea that no one but the workers themselves has any right to standardize the conditions of labor or the scale of wages.

As a rough general proposition, American labor hitherto, whether unionized or non-unionized, has not thought beyond specific things that it wants and ways and means of getting them. As an equally rough general proposition, American capital hitherto, whether benevolent or predatory, has not thought on problems here in mind beyond ways and means of holding all the power it has, and yielding nothing to labor beyond certain hand-outs which do not weaken property rights. The stage of industrial society that has arrived in Europe and may date its arrival in this country with the return of Mr. Gompers from his latest conferences with foreign labor leaders is one in which labor will be familiar with a theory that property itself is usurpation and that the world belongs to the

manual workers. Everyone who has observed the psychology of crowds knows that in periods of social unrest, in times when older arrangements are dissolving and substitutes are not yet installed, the mental operations of the masses most affected resemble the tendency in the circulation of money known as "Gresham's Law," viz., the baser currency drives out the better. The moment that the ideas which had previously held society together lose that controlling power, competing ideas take possession of the unsettled minds, and these ideas do not stop with correcting the errors of the old ones. They not only drive out the oldest ideas, and newer ones which may be better, but they do not stop there. Before equilibrium is restored the ideas in circulation and control may have flown to the opposite extreme of futility and perhaps fatality. That is what took place in the French Revolution. The old régime was first criticized in a mildly academic way. It was then jostled in a rude, ungentlemanly way. It was then garroted and beheaded in a frenzied, barbarian way. The same inverted progress from worse to worst is now visible in Russia, where the Bolshevik Communist party, as Lenine now calls it, proposes to redeem Russia and then the rest of the world by the "dictatorship of the proletariat." This means the suppression by violence of everyone who resists the exclusive rule of those who work with their hands. It means a régime in which it shall be law that no one shall have more property or income than the average workman has. It means a régime in which no one shall have any more influence upon any business, whether economic or political, than the average workman has. It means a régime in which, while it is overcoming the resistance of the old régime, anyone who has less has license to take, if he can, from him who has more, and not merely to get all the enjoyment there is in the goods thus acquired, but to pronounce a benediction upon himself as a servant of righteousness besides.

I am not concerned at this point with the ethics of this vision nor with its feasibility. I am concerned now solely with its seductiveness. It would be a superdevil who could invent an idea more likely to craze a proletarian, if he begins to ponder about himself as a proletarian. Suppose an American citizen faces the fact that he has no legal right to anything but today's wages. Suppose he

falls to brooding over the fact that he holds his job only so long as another man consents to let him hold it, and if that consent is withdrawn, and no other man renews it, his only claim left is to choose between starvation, suicide, and the poorhouse. Then suppose the most masterful men of his kind that he knows stand up in crowds of proletarians and proclaim, "It's a trick! It's a fraud! It's a lie! The world belongs to us and they've stolen it from us. Come on! Let's go and take it back!" No one capable of imagining himself in that man's place can offer an explanation that can satisfy even himself why Bolsheviks have not come sooner and everywhere and in larger numbers. It would be a peculiarly constituted man who could contemplate the number of men in this country in the situation described and could persist in the belief that Bolshevism is no concern of ours.

A man whose whole training has been in handling *things*, and who tries to handle an idea, thereupon converts himself into an extra-hazardous risk. The chances are, not that he will master it, but that it will master him. The chances are that its mastery over him will be not the guiding, cautioning, proportioning regulation and stimulation of the truth in the idea, but that it will be some unbalancing, exaggerating, misdirecting excitement from something very likely not properly in the idea at all, something which may be forced into or forced upon the idea if imagination is allowed its way. Mother-Eddyism and Mother-Eddyists are typical cases. The man controlled by a bizarre version of an idea, or by forced meanings of an idea, is like Victor Hugo's gun that had jumped its moorings on deck in a gale—useless for his proper work and dangerous to all around. All this is unfortunately in direct ratio with the amount of truth contained in the perverted and perverting idea.

At risk of suspicion that I am myself already a pervert of Bolshevism, I must point out that this doctrine, which has become so fantastic and intolerable, starts from a premise which increasing numbers of men who abhor Bolshevism are learning to regard as unimpeachable, namely, that *capital, as it is legally established in modern industrial countries, is bound to answer to the charge of having acquired legal rights which public policy cannot permanently concede*. For the present I may let this proposition stand as the

precipe, so to speak, without trying to represent any complainant with a bill of particulars.

Let it be repeated that the writer of this letter does not present it as *proof* of anything. It has simply the character of an opinion. The degree of sobriety which readers will credit to the author of the opinion is its prime credential. Its further sanction must be derived from the consensus of readers that the significance which the letter attributes to notorious facts accords with their best judgment. If then I have demonstrated nothing further than a certain agreement in reading those signs of the times which have been referred to above, I have at least established a credible working hypothesis. Apparently the attempt to reconstruct property so that it will more adequately represent present conceptions of justice is to have large scope in the near future. Herewith we arrive at the setting for the appeal which I am about to make; the judgment, namely, that *a church which has no positive attitude, no definite policy toward the group of problems thus indicated, can scarcely hope to impress men whose lives pivot upon these problems as dealing with anything very close to reality.*

Not long ago the writer, with another outsider, was present at a meeting of about twenty labor leaders in one of our large cities. A reference was made to the churches, and one of the labor men exclaimed, "There ain't a minister in this town except ——, that cares a damn about the workingman!" and a general "that's so!" ran around the table. Anyone who knew the ministers of that town would have expressed almost the contradictory estimate, for not a minister in that town, with the possible exception of A, B, or C, would not be a Golden Rule type of friend to the workingman if he only knew how and if he had the opportunity. The facts are that only here and there a minister knows how, and only those ministers whose charges are in workingmen's districts have favorable conditions for learning how. Under the circumstances of the particular town in which the incident occurred there is very little contact between labor leaders and the Protestant ministers, so that their opinion was not surprising. It will be the rule among workingmen until the gap between them and the churches, at least so far as exchange of accurate information goes, can be closed.

There may be more plausibility than conclusiveness in the hypothesis which has interested Old Testament scholars for several years, that the thread which leads straightest through the tangle of the history of Israel is the long struggle between the type of justice which satisfied the Baal worshipers of the towns and that type of justice which appealed to the Jahwe worshipers of the open country. However that may have been, it is common knowledge among people who understand their Bibles, and it is equally evident to students of Christian history from the close of the Canon up till now, that obligation to know justice and to do justice has been a traditional part of the profession of Jewish and Christian religions. The great majority of American Christians, whether Catholic or Protestant, would regard it as utterly unwarranted defamation of character if anyone should question the controlling purpose of their respective groups to stand for justice, at all costs, both when recognized justice is threatened and when circumstances require that undiscovered justice should be ascertained. Whatever may be the incidents of the next stage of relations between economic classes, there is little room for doubt that the issues will be presented by the opposing interests more or less clearly in terms of "justice." In so far as the churches come into notice in connection with these issues, each side will demand that the churches throw their weight on the side of "justice" as the respective sides understand "justice." On such a general issue as this, the churches will be in a deplorable plight if they are unable to speak, not only positively and emphatically, but with substantial unanimity. It would be an exhibit of pitiful incompetence if, in this critical period, bodies of the ability and resources of the Protestant churches of our northern states should default their special responsibility for interpreting Christian justice in the circumstances peculiar to the times. For reasons, however, which it is unnecessary to recite it is our duty to recognize the fact that our churches are not merely in a state of unpreparedness to formulate convincing rules of justice applicable to present and coming conditions, but this state of unpreparedness is likely often to make well-meant attempts by individuals to declare justice in the name of religion mischievous in confusing already entangled situations. Next to fundamentally upright

purpose the most essential prerequisite to judicial conclusions is *adequate information*. Neither prerequisite can be sufficient without the other and neither can assure the other. As members of the churches we believe that their purpose is dependably Christian. As members of the churches we must confess, on the other hand, that for direct and effective influence upon standards of economic justice they are not only impotently uninformed, but the information and supposed information within their control is of such miscellaneous character as to relevance, as to accuracy, as to completeness, and as to the precise circumstances to which the information is primarily related that judgments based upon such information can seldom be conclusive. Judgments ventured, indeed, in the name of religion, on the basis of such information, have not infrequently fomented more trouble than they removed. In this respect the situation of the churches with reference to economic class conflicts is comparable with the situation of the American public in general at the present moment (January 18) with reference to the questions before the Peace Congress. We are dependent for our information almost exclusively upon the newspaper correspondents. What shall we think about such cardinal problems as a "league of nations," "freedom of the seas," terms of reparation, territorial readjustments? Many of us decided long ago that it would be a waste of time for us to accept the newspaper invitations to keep excited over these problems, for the simple reason that, temporarily at least, we are in a state of worse than ignorance as to what the problems actually involve in the minds of the men who will put them in the next shape for world acceptance or rejection. We see that the correspondents are giving us chiefly their guesses about more or less crucial factors in the case, together with much more that is of doubtful importance. These guesses are incoherent and irreconcilable, and available for scarcely anything more than satisfaction of our craving for fiction. It is to be feared that everyone who is using these reports as a basis for political agitation is doing the public more injury than service.

It is within the power of our churches to command the information necessary to give religion its appropriate influence upon the issues we are discussing. All that I have said converges then upon

the following recommendation: *That the Laymen's Committee on Inter-Church Survey urge as many churches as are willing to co-operate (1) to organize and support a permanent commission for investigation into, and report upon, near and remote causes and details of any economic class conflicts which may develop in this country; (2) that the commission be instructed to study such conflicts on the ground, not as attempted arbitrators, but as accredited representatives of associated churches, with the aim of, so far as possible, exhausting all the material facts in the given case, especially those which have any appreciable bearing upon principles of justice; (3) that the associated churches be urged to make provision for the widest circulation of the reports of this committee among the leaders of thought, both ministers and laymen, in their respective bodies; (4) that the commission be charged also with the duty of reporting, from time to time (primarily with reference to their accuracy, their fairness to all the interests concerned, and the competence of their authors to pass the kinds of judgment involved) upon books, pamphlets, and magazine articles which purport to represent Christian principles at issue in economic conflicts; (5) that the commission be instructed to avoid duplication of work already in progress by organizations whose results are of such a character that they may be appropriated by the commission; (6) that the churches associated in this enterprise, and all others that approve of it, be urged to use their influence to secure for the publications of the commission, and the other publications which they recommend, all the attention which they may be found to deserve as materials for the construction of standards of justice which shall apply Christian principles to the special conflicts of ideas about justice which develop under our present form of industrial organization.*

The considerations which follow are virtually footnotes to the foregoing recommendation. They have been set down in the order in which they suggested themselves.

1. The sort of commission contemplated is one that would command the respect of any congressional committee, or court of justice, or board of directors, or trade-union council. It should be made up of men and women who, in the first place, have had the sort of experience which has fitted them for the job, and, secondly, are of a character which cannot be bribed, wheedled, or

frightened into findings not in the evidence, to please either party.

2. The contracts with the members of the commission should cover a term of years, so that they may be as independent as possible of all uncertainty about tenure.

3. The salaries and appropriations for expenses should be on the scale necessary to secure the contemplated grade of service, and to provide the facilities to give it the largest range of usefulness.

4. As a mere matter of tactics, such a commission would almost ideally serve as what promoters call "a talking proposition." Establish such a commission, composed of persons whose intelligence, competence, and integrity could not be impeached; instruct it to go to the bottom, if there is a bottom, of the conflict situations that arise; publish their findings as frankly as Mr. Hughes's reports on the insurance situation were published; let it be known that the work is the work of the associated churches, and that it represents their determination to do everything in their power in the service of social justice—do this, and it will be the most silencing answer that ever has been given to either of the many variations of the charge that the church is owned by the rich and does the rich man's dirty work.

5. The recommendation will of course meet instant opposition on the ground that numerous denominations already have agencies which are faithfully endeavoring to discover and circulate knowledge on these subjects as a part of denominational education, not only intellectual and religious, but social. The recommendation does not ignore nor undervalue the agencies referred to. They are doing highly important work, but the nature of their limitations is such that the men who are carrying the heaviest burdens of this work will doubtless be most prompt to see that, however acceptably they may function within their sphere, within their respective denominations, or within a group of co-operating denominations, they are not so constituted as to discharge the principal functions which the recommendation contemplates.

6. The commission recommended would cover all the ground, in the way of taking and sifting evidence, on which the responsible master in chancery bases his advice to the court. The churches

would then no longer be, any more than the judge is, after receiving the findings of the master in chancery, at the mercy of hearsay, of newspaper gossip, of *ex parte* testimonies or representations. The churches would be like the judge after the case had been properly made up—in a position to render the most judicial decision possible under the circumstances.

7. The findings of the commission on each important matter which it investigated would be first-page news for every daily paper in the country, just as the summaries of the Pittsburgh Survey were. The papers that did not publish these findings would thereby automatically condemn themselves as either incompetent or uncandid.

8. The habit which would soon be formed of depending upon the church commission for the fairest treatment of class conflicts would do more than any other influence in sight to narrow the no-man's-land between the "unchurched" and the churches.

9. The existence of a common source of information which could be trusted would tend to produce homogeneous and therewith influential public opinion within the churches, in place of cross-currents of irresponsibly advised church opinion which largely neutralize one another and consequently limit the influence of religion.

10. More fundamental than any of the foregoing considerations is the assumption of the recommendation that the churches want to find ways of making religion a continuous and pervasive force in men's lives, not merely the occupant of a secluded section of their experience. If the churches really mean to "get into the game," this is one of the big openings.

Faternally submitted,

ALBION W. SMALL